

OPINION & FEATURES



Sen Daniel K. Akaka (D-HI)

(Still) waiting and hoping

IN HIS continuing advocacy to reunite our Fil-Am WWII veterans with their children in the Philippines, US Senator Daniel K. Akaka recently reintroduced the Filipino Veterans Family Reunification Act of 2009.

The bill seeks to exempt sons and daughters of Filipino veterans from immigration numerical quotas that have delayed the processing of their US visas. Depending when the petitions were filed, the waiting time takes at least 18 years.

Currently, there are 7,000 Fil-Am WWII vets residing in the United States, many of whom have already filed visa petitions for their children in the Philippines. But our manongs, already in their eighties and nineties, fear that they may never be able to see their children come to the US.

Our Fil-Am vets have been sitting in the waiting room for decades, overlooked and ignored by

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the same country who promised them seven decades ago that they will be rewarded for their courageous alliance with the US Army during WWII. Yet even after emerging victorious, our Fil-Am vets were not even allowed to bring their spouses and children to the US. This situation has never been rectified, and attempts to do so have failed.

Our veterans deserve affirmative action. Akaka's bill hopes to elevate their simple request -- a just and well-deserved reward for their courage and bravery as US servicemen. At the last chapter of their lives, reuniting with their children holds so much importance for our Fil-Am vets and it's not too much to ask that they be granted this final wish. (AJPress)

Time for immigration reform is now

(Editor's Note: This editorial was produced in association with New America Media www.newamericamedia.org, a national association of ethnic media, and was published by ethnic media across the country this week to bring attention to the urgency of immigration reform.)

THE White House and members of Congress must move quickly on enacting a just and humane immigration reform package that will reunite families, reinvigorate the economy, and remove the term "illegal or undocumented immigrants" from the dialogue in this country. Ethnic media, which reaches over 60 million adults in the United States, calls on Congress to move decisively on immigration reform be-

cause there are few issues as important to the nation's well-being as an overhaul of the inefficient, inhumane and economically debilitating immigration system. More importantly, we are also urging our readers and viewers to contact their Senators and Congressmen and let them know that immigration reform must be a national priority.

The immigration system is broken not just for 12 million undocumented immigrants, but also for specialized workers blocked from joining the American economy because of narrow quotas, and mothers and fathers and brothers and sisters of US citizens who must wait for years before being reunited with their families.

Our nation needs comprehensive immigration policies that will replace a broken system of raids and roundups with one that protects all workers from exploitation, improves America's security and builds strong communities. It's time to end the division between workers, which has allowed big business to exploit both sides. Clearly, working-class citizens and immigrant workers have much in common -- dreams of better homes, education for their families and quality healthcare. There is more that brings us together, than separates us. United we can be a strong force for change, changes that that bring more workforce safety and humane conditions.

Immigration is often portrayed as an explosive, divisive issue. In reality it's not. Since the repeal of the national origins quota system in 1965, which discriminated against certain immigrants, a consensus has been building towards an immigration system that respects the country's core values. These include economic opportunity, equality under the law regardless of ethnic background, and an embrace of the world's most innovative, energetic and ambitious workers. Now, with the country facing serious competition from workers abroad, it's more important than ever to create a world-class immigration system. It's good for families, good for communities and good for America. ■

Chapter endings to new beginnings: Synergy to prodigy

"TO truly leave well we need to have faith that our instincts are speaking truth to us: we can't let anyone dissuade us from our new path. When endings become a new way of life, being prepared for departure is as important as being successful at the job itself. And done right, our exits lead us to great entrances."

Candice Carpenter

June is the month of chapter endings for graduates in college, high school and culminations for elementary students bound for middle school. It is also about infinite possibilities: a figure of eight, at the same time. The P-graduation (Pilipino American Graduation) at UC Berkeley themed it as: "(In) finite", infinite possibilities, finite endings for a limited chapter in these students' lives. It is a duality, an ending and a beginning, life's bookends.

College equipped its graduates with critical thinking to challenge the old order: "Why submit to the tradition when I can invent another?" Social networking became virtual communities and facebook friendships, twittering their activities to new discoveries, even creative zones of innovation, their outlets for self-expression: cds, paintings, exhibits, books, songs, underground get-togethers, inventions, alternative lifestyles, magazines, film festivals, performing arts, videos and fundraisers and now witnesses to public square activities.

With technology, today's graduates are perceived as keys to change, free to catalyze, free to not hold themselves down to unattained generational promises, as if alchemists. "Kaya", we can, morphs to "Tayo", we are. We can and we are free to imagine new possibilities. Freedom to pursue a new future. Freedom to create a new world without poverty, without inequality, their idealism meeting their own pragmatism and the 21st technology tools.

"Tunay ba tayong malaya?" How can we manifest that we are free? *Malaya ba tayong magisip?* For me, freedom has four pillars: courage to risk what you have to pursue your dreams, creative control over your life, nurturing a loving space for others to thrive, and a belief that the Universal Source is our partner and even an uncertain future is an exciting beginning, an empty canvas for these graduates to sketch, to paint, to create their new lives, just like UC Merced graduates.

Courage to risk what you have to



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Prosy Abarquez Delacruz, J.D.

pursue your dreams. UC Merced students wanted the focus on their campus. They could not even be dissuaded by UC Regent John Garimendi who suggested their efforts might be futile. But, these students believed strongly that their dreams would manifest in time.

"There are few things that are more rewarding than to watch young people recognize that they have the power to make their dreams come true. And you did just that. Your perseverance and creativity were on full display in your efforts to bring me here to Merced," US First Lady Michelle Obama said, in her May 2009 commencement address to UC Merced students, with 12,000 in attendance. These graduates dreamed, worked hard, and their dreams actualized!

More risks were taken by the students who had the courage to make a difference. 100 clubs were born at UC Merced, including the first student-run newspaper, Prodigy, founded by a visionary Filipina-American, Nicole Mayo. Her team created a space to share information without institutional filters. They dared to create a newspaper without direct funding from the university. They opted for the support of businesses and student organizations. The payoff: a paper free from censorship, a student-run paper, now operating as a business, with Darryl Liu, an adept leader at the helm.

Nicole reflected on their beginnings: "For us Prodigy meant what it means, that we are extraordinary, special people. We are all from the Pioneer class, we all graduated from high school with honors and we all are attending UC Merced. After discovering our name, we needed a place to print, so *Merced Sun-Star*, a local paper of Merced, became our new best friend. We met with their directors and they helped us by giving us an incredible price for printing and by giving us input on our layouts. They are a big help to the Prodigy."

These students dared to pursue their dreams and realized them! But beyond realizing them, they also retained creative control over the paper's content and layout.

Freedom means creative control over your life. Some folks equate tensions as a necessary part of who they are, becoming a significant part of their daily lives. They have a belief: "Only five more years and I will have the freedom to create my life as I want it."

Their inner struggle attracts negativity. Their stress triggers fearful thoughts: How do we proceed without losing the chance to make monies or risk being pre-empted?

Anticipating blockage, instead of persuasion, they approach meetings, like football games: someone throws an idea, only to be blocked, triggering reactions. A reactive culture is born, and drama is the operating currency, instead of creativity. The winner is the staff member who performs to popular attention, cultivates antagonisms, and bullies others to his direction. Merit and competence fail and mediocrity becomes the sole survivor. Teamwork is absent.

What if in place of drama, a culture of trust and hope is proactively built where each member thrives and has creative control over their workplace? Witness the success of Gawad Kalinga. Their vision is clear: build 700,000 homes for poor families in 7,000 communities and end poverty as we see it in 7 years. Even UC Berkeley and UC Los Angeles students are pooling their efforts to build these homes.

In six years, 2,000 communities now have 200,000 homes built, all the way from Aparri to Jolo, each community retaining their creative control in organizing themselves. Even the violence in Sulu made way for a truce, a temporary peace making, bringing together Muslims and Catholics to build homes.

As these communities stepped forward to show that we matter, and therefore we retain the artistic right to design our lives, even in poverty, we can engage, imagine, and articulate what matters most: decent housing, potable source of water, electricity, decent health care, schooling for our children and decent sources of livelihood.

Articulating these, folks come to help from around the globe to make a difference to support these folks in redesigning their lives. And as they do this, they find themselves part of a loving space which nurtures each volunteer and each person is trusted because each person conducts themselves as trustworthy members of the community.

Freedom means a loving space for



Carlo Delacruz with Al Gore at UC Berkeley, surrounded by other Blum fellows on Public Policy, Global Poverty and Practice.

each member to thrive and trusting others. Can you imagine interacting with these folks where each volunteer builds on another's idea, eager for another person to succeed? Can you feel the electricity and creative sparks of positive energies transferred from one to the other? The place is dynamic, constantly growing and new ideas are surfacing.

What were once perceived as barriers are now new opportunities for solutions, for collaborating each person's creative juices and thoughts. Imagine how much excitement is generated when everyone actually thrives, as everyone manifests his personal strengths in helping one another. This is a healthy concept of relationships!

I watched this unfold in the P-graduation at UC Berkeley, where each team member respectfully conveyed their ideas, carefully checked with each other, and carried their activity to a flawless result, a graduation ceremony carried to its finality, without logistical problems, but where the Filipino-Americans learned to function as healthy teammates supporting the larger goal of running a graduation, attended by close to a thousand without a hitch.

And some of these graduates are on their way home to the Philippines for the summer of their lives, building homes for Gawad Kalinga. Their actual lives are already beginning, mattering to another person, making a difference to communities in other countries not their own, and evolving themselves in the process.

Yes, the future seems uncertain and the fog of recession has not quite lifted. But, these graduates are free to have faith that the Universe is our loving partner, that slow growth is around the corner.

Freedom means faith that the Universe is our loving partner. And to those who have faith, the graduates seem joyful expressing gratitude. "Thanks to my loving parents, my friends, my loved ones, my professors, my mentors, and everyone who has helped shape my college experience for the past 4 years. Thank you for your guidance. To my family, your support and love sustained me and this wouldn't be possible without you. Thank you for everything that you do for me, I hope I've made you proud. To my PAA family, you're simply the best things I could ever ask for. You make me so proud, and you keep me in check. To CalServe, you're the best class I've ever taken at CAL. Thank you for teaching me so much." (NO SOURCE? WHO IS SAYING THIS? WHY IN QUOTES?)

They sense that there is a larger community, and the Universe is their loving partner, eager to usher them to success. They spoke of the infinite, the figure of eight, possibilities, as they embraced uncertainty! Grace-filled beginnings come from exits done right, as we walk full of gratitude to folks who have contributed to our success. In synergy, prodigies are created, connected to reach the family and the community's loving embrace! *Mabuhay* graduates, I salute you! ■

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